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ABSTRACT

In 1974, the Facilitating Educational Achievement through Telecommunications (FEATT) project began a study to test the efficacy of specially produced video cassettes to teach parents of severely handicapped children how to instruct their children in basic psychomotor skills. Fifty families in Northern Indiana agreed to field test the tapes. Researchers identified 60 critical developmental skills, and a series of color video tapes was produced and shown in participant's homes by means of video playback units. An evaluation of Project FEATT has concluded that the Programs were effective in instructing parents, and that increased parent skill has resulted in improved child behavior. (JMH)

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TELEVISION AND PARENT EDUCATION: AN EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION

by

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There are more than a million handicapped children of preschool age in the United States. (HEW, 1975)

The President's Committee on Mental Retardation's Report for 1974 suggested that during the 1974-75 school year there would be an estimated 927,000 unserved handicapped children between the ages of birth to five. (HEW, 1975)

The above statistics are shocking, aren't they? Nonetheless, they were true. In response to these and similar figures, more than 150 federally supported projects -- sometimes referred to as First Chance Projects -- have been developed over the past few years. In light of the above statistics, these projects have been only scratching the surface. There are two apparent problems delaying widespread implementation of the models developed with federal support. While the cost of many of these projects is not exorbitant compared to the potential cost of long-term institutionalization, many are beyond the financial resources of most state and local agencies. Another complicating factor is the lack of trained personnel with which to staff these programs. One solution to these problems, which have persisted for more than 10 years, was to seek a more cost effective service delivery system. Television seemed to be an extremely attractive alternative. Consequently Project FEATT was created to weld telecommunications technology and exemplary parent training practices into a cost effective system to enrich the lives of several million young children.

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Facilitating Educational Achievement Through Telecommunications, supported by a contract with the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, United States Office of Education, began its two year demonstration (in July 1974) of the efficacy of telecommunications in the field of infant learning and parent education. No one said it would be easy and it wasn't.

In search for cost effectiveness, FEATT has kept two important goals in mind: the product must (a) seek to decrease the institutionalization of severely/profoundly handicapped children and (b) it must in some way help prepare these children to enter an educational setting outside the home but within the community. Being advocates of keeping the child at home, if at all possible, FEATT realized that the home was where help was needed. This was even more true in the many rural areas where there were no existing agencies to help families with preschool handicapped children. The parents needed support. So that is where we started.

During the past two years, the Project has developed, produced, and field-tested videotaped programs designed to teach parents how to help their handicapped child master critical developmental tasks such as crawling, finger feeding, or simply rolling from the back to the stomach. The series entitled "Next Steps Together" includes approximately 45 programs instructing parents in the areas of language, self-help, and motor development between the developmental ages of birth to two years. Notice, it is not the chronological age that is important. These programs are appropriate for children who are functioning between the 0-2 year age range.

The Past

The evolution of these programs, like all TV production, over the past two years has been a time consuming and complex process. The first year was a planning year, i.e., finding a target population, deciding what developmental tasks should be made

into programs, and more importantly, mapping all the intricate steps in the production of broadcast quality television.

After much door knocking, a target population was found. Fifty families in Northern Indiana answered the call for participation. A list of 60 critical developmental tasks was chosen from a list of over 300 tasks compiled from numerous sources. This list which changed several times was at last finalized in December 1975, six months after production was well under way.

While the door knocking and task deciding was going on, materials development specialists along with production personnel were doing some thinking of their own. They had to plan for the achievement of commercial quality standards in the programs.

After a black and white pilot program was produced, it was decided the tapes should be in color. Of course this meant that color equipment must be purchased (the available studio didn't have any), the host set must be changed to be appropriate for color, and all future sets as well as clothing must be chosen with color in mind.

It was also decided that each program would be completely scripted. The script would be written before any taping could take place and would consist of two segments..

1. Host segment -- this would include introduction to the program stating why the task is important for a child to learn, what pre-requisite skills a child must have in order to be ready for the task, and also what materials might be needed. The host would also add transitions between inserts as well as a summary at the end.

2a. Training inserts -- this would show one of five on camera trainers instructing a parent by working with the child herself.

2b. Training inserts -- parents would be shown working with their child and attempting to use the strategies just demonstrated by the trainer.

The Present

Since the summer of 1975, production has been underway. Production begins with the taping of the training inserts. For any given program, the inserts might take from one day to several weeks to get on tape. It all depends on the talent -- namely the children. In the event that a child isn't upset, uncomfortable, or deemed inappropriate for the task, an insert has a good chance of being completed. Approximately one out of every three tries for an insert meets acceptance standards.

After all inserts for one program are obtained, the host is brought in for the final production. In a two day period four to five programs can usually be completed if all graphics, music, props and film clips are ready.

In September of 1975, broadcasting began and is currently still in progress. There are two ways in which programs may be viewed. Most families receive a video cassette which they insert into a playback unit which has been connected to their home TV sets. They can then watch the program at their convenience. The remaining families view one program a week over a semi-private CATV channel that has been selected specifically for FEATT's viewing audience.

Accompanying each program is an activity guide which encompases all of the important aspects of the tape. This is to give the parents some supportive information after the tape has been seen.

In order to ensure appropriate programming for a child, an assessment specialist conducts a home visit once every two weeks. During this visit the child is evaluated using a project devised developmental checklist. All records the family has been keeping

are also collected. The home visitor may at this time facilitate modifications in materials or prodedures depending on each child's needs. This helps to guarantee individualized programming.

The Future!

The Project FEATT programs have been subjected to an extensive formative and summative evaluation. The evaluation, which was national in scope, included collection and analysis of data on the following variables:

1. The series' effect on knowledge of child development and child training procedures.
2. Parents' ability to use the demonstrated skills.
3. Viewers' reaction to the programs.
4. Childrens' progress.
5. The technical quality of the series.

Analysis of the data concluded that the series is an effective instructional tool which meets the standards of acceptable commercial quality production.

Therefore the future could hold a lot in store for Project FEATT. The series has the potential for four major uses:

1. Individually prescribed instruction (It's present use).
2. Parent Education.
3. Public information or awareness.
4. Professional and paraprofessional training.

There is also a possibility of three types of delivery systems.

1. Home video cassette players
2. Community cable television
3. Public television

How they will be used or the delivery system by which they are received depends on the individuals wishing to implement the programs. The more children being served off of one set of programs, however, the more cost-effective the system becomes.

PBS will be showing the programs starting this fall. Local PBS stations will have the opportunity to obtain the programs if they so desire. Several agencies around the country are also purchasing copies to use as inservice training programs as well as to implement in their parent programs.

We hope this is only the beginning of a revolutionary change in educational instruction. Television is a relatively untapped resource which if used effectively can serve millions -- including the more than a million handicapped preschool children.

(As of June 30, 1976, Project FEATT will no longer be based at Purdue University. At this time the future location is not known.)